

# BY THE WATER

BY SHARYN ROTHSTEIN



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BY THE WATER  
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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This play and its characters are fiction, but I am deeply grateful to Derek Tabacco, Joseph Tirone, Samantha Langello, and the other Staten Islanders who shared their stories of strength and survival with me.

Special thanks to Emily Shooltz, Jason Eagan, Annie MacRae, Doug Hughes, Diana Glazer, and Marilyn & Alan Rothstein (my lifelong dramaturgs and cheerleaders) for their brilliant insight and support.

And to my husband Jeff, who makes my world — and my plays — funnier.

*BY THE WATER* was commissioned by the Writer's Room (Manhattan Theatre Club, Ars Nova) and received its world premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) in association with Ars Nova (Jason Eagan, Artistic Director; Renee Blinkwolt, Managing Director) on November 4, 2014. It was directed by Hal Brooks; the scenic design was by Wilson Chin; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Tyler Micoleau; the original music and sound design was by Ryan Rumery; and the production stage manager was E Sara Barnes. The cast was as follows:

MARTY MURPHY .....	Vyto Ruginis
MARY MURPHY.....	Deirdre O'Connell
SAL MURPHY.....	Quincy Dunn-Baker
BRIAN MURPHY.....	Tom Pelphrey
PHILIP CARTER.....	Ethan Phillips
ANDREA CARTER .....	Charlotte Maier
EMILY MANCINI .....	Cassie Beck

## **CHARACTERS**

MARTY MURPHY, 62, blue-collar, a community man with a fierce sense of loyalty and of the way the world should work. Tough but charming. Capable of changing moods on a dime.

MARY MURPHY, 60, a woman of faith, sweet but never saccharine. A loving mother and very devoted wife, who has made a life out of looking past the faults of those she loves.

SAL MURPHY, 34, ambitious, smart, a born-again Manhattanite. An innate sense of humor and warmth have been chipped away at by an unforgiving family, but they're still there.

BRIAN MURPHY, 30, a recovering user and all-around badass. Inherited his father's charm and quick laugh; until a recent stint in prison, he lived a dangerously charmed life of being rewarded for the wrong things.

PHILIP CARTER, early 60s, a retired auto-mechanic/body-shop owner, a friendly man with an easy sense of humor, a natural peacekeeper.

ANDREA CARTER, early 60s, funny, shrewd, and opinionated; the kind of great friend and strong woman who quickly becomes more sister than friend.

EMILY MANCINI, 30, Brian's former high school sweetheart; now a wry, self-aware woman coming to terms with a crumbling marriage and the fact that life at 30 doesn't look like what she thought it would. Works in the city, probably lives in Brooklyn or Queens.

## **PLACE & TIME**

The storm-ravaged home of Marty and Mary Murphy, on the eastern coast of Staten Island, New York. After Hurricane Sandy.

## **NOTE**

Slashes ( / ) indicate where the next line overlaps.

It's helpful if the audience feels like some time has passed between Scenes 10 and 11. Directors and designers are encouraged to find creative ways to express the time-pass.

# BY THE WATER

## Scene 1

*The stage is the ravaged remains of a house. The house is the home of Marty Murphy and his wife, Mary.*

*When the hurricane hit, the Murphys had lived in this house for 34 years, and before that it belonged to Marty's father. Now: a destroyed couch, crushed end tables, glass everywhere. A four-foot-high watermark. And that smell. Still, they're better off than many. The house, seven short blocks from the water and built up a few feet after the 1992 Nor'easter, is still standing.*

*It might take us a moment to realize we can see inside of it because there's a huge hole in the living room wall. A moment. Then, voices from the kitchen.*

MARY. (*Offstage.*) The smell ...

MARTY. (*Offstage.*) I told you we shoulda brought nose plugs.

MARY. All this food ... What a waste. What a terrible waste.

(*Marty enters the living room, bundled for the cold, wearing a surgical mask. He takes it off when he enters the room. The scope of the loss hits him hard. Marty looks like he might be sick, or he might cry. Both. He's a strong man, but this ... Mary enters, holding a blender. She takes off her mask.*) I found the Magic Bullet.

MARTY. Well that's a relief. (*She smiles. He pulls her close. Together, they take in the mess.*) That hole in the wall's gonna make it hard to be intimate.

MARY. The neighbors could use a good show right about now. (*Marty laughs.*) If we still have any. Neighbors.

MARTY. They'll come back. Everybody'll come back. (*Mary nods. She holds up the blender.*)

MARY. You want a smoothie? (*They put their masks back on and stare out, toward the missing wall, toward the sea ...*)

## Scene 2

*It's still a mess, but they've done what they can: You can see the floorboards. The couch has been moved out. They've moved a lot of debris into piles. The walls are down to their studs.*

*Lights on Sal Murphy as he enters the house through the tarp-covered missing wall. He's wearing plastic gloves, an industrial-looking parka, sturdy boots.*

SAL. Mom? Dad? ... (*Overwhelmed at the destruction.*) Oh my god.

MARY. (*Offstage.*) Is that Sal? (*Enters from the kitchen, her phone to her ear.*) You want something? Diet Pepsi?

SAL. (*Stricken.*) Diet Pepsi? (*Marty enters with contractor bags, which he begins filling with debris.*)

MARTY. Nice outfit. You're going fly-fishing?

SAL. Mom said you needed help clearing stuff out. (*Marty shoots Mary a look.*)

MARY. Your back.

MARTY. My back's fine.

SAL. And I couldn't find my HazMat suit, so —

MARY. Your what suit? (*To Marty.*) His what suit?

SAL. HazMat, like those big, with the — nevermind. This is ... (*Marty throws Sal a bag, but Sal doesn't even know where to start.*)

MARTY. It looks worse than it is. (*Slight beat.*) Well no, it looks just as bad as it is.

MARY. (*Into the phone.*) Hello? Hello?

MARTY. She's been on hold all / week.

MARY. (*To Sal.*) Insurance. (*Into the phone.*) Are you there? (*Exits for the driveway.*)

SAL. Everything's ...

# BY THE WATER

## by Sharyn Rothstein

4M, 3W

Hurricane Sandy has just ravaged the lifelong Staten Island home of Marty and Mary Murphy. But the storm has ripped apart more than just the walls: with their neighbors too devastated to stay, the couple's beloved community is in danger of disappearing forever. Determined to rebuild, Marty wages a campaign to save his neighborhood and his home, but when the Murphys' sons arrive to help their parents dig out, past betrayals come rushing to the surface. With fierce compassion and poignant humor, *BY THE WATER* reminds us that the very powers that tear us apart can also bring us together.

*"Rothstein's affecting play traces the impact of a devastating natural disaster on a middle-class couple who were already trudging uphill. Drawn with acute sympathy and in gritty detail, the play dramatizes the kind of story that filled newspapers in the months after Hurricane Sandy. It's clear from the pungent dialogue — which is seasoned with salty humor — that Rothstein knows these characters inside out."* —**The New York Times**

*"Four stars! *BY THE WATER* is a solid play about a dissolving world; the Murphys may have built on sand, but Rothstein builds on bedrock. This Superstorm drama is a force of nature."* —**Time Out (New York)**

*"A first-rate play. Before she reaches her bittersweet ending, Rothstein has examined a strong marriage that's greatly tested and has probed deeply into fractious parent-child relationships. What she's wise about demonstrating is the multi-faceted nature of love."*

—**Huffington Post**

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